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⑫

## EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

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### ㉓ Procedure and apparatus for wrapping a fodder bale with plastic.

㉔ The fodder bale (1) to be wrapped is lifted onto a wrapping table (3) and plastic material is wrapped around the bale, whereupon the bale is removed from the wrapping table. To pick up a bale from the field, the wrapping table (3) is tilted and the wrapping machine is moved towards the bale with the wrapping table in a position where that edge which is closer to the bale is lower down, close to the ground. At the same time, picking devices (6) designed to lift the bale are held in a position of readiness, and when the machine is sufficiently close to the bale, the picking devices are turned to their inner position, the wrapping table is turned back into a horizontal position, the picking devices are turned back into the position of readiness, and the bale is wrapped with plastic, whereupon it is removed from the wrapping table.

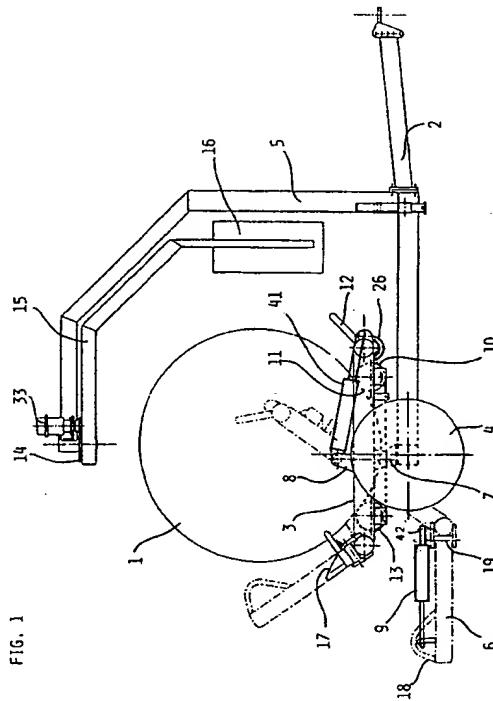


FIG. 1

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The present invention relates to a procedure for wrapping a bale of hay or straw, such as a fodder bale, with plastic, in which procedure the bale to be wrapped is lifted onto a wrapping table and plastic material is wrapped around the bale, whereupon the bale is removed from the wrapping table.

In prior art, cylindrical straw feed bales have been wrapped with plastic e.g. by means of a wrapping machine fitted to the hitch system of a tractor. Such a wrapping machine is connected directly to the power output of the tractor and has no supporting wheels, which means that it has to be of as light a construction as possible. A light construction is mainly achieved by not providing the wrapping machine with a separate device for lifting the bale, and using another tractor to lift the bales onto the wrapping machine. This is a very serious drawback because the bale wrapping job requires the use of two tractors simultaneously. If this type of bale wrapping machine without supporting wheels is provided with a lifting device of its own, the result will be a heavy machine. To operate such a machine, big and expensive tractors would have to be used, involving economic disadvantages.

Another previously known procedure for the wrapping of bales with plastic is to use a side-loading wrapping machine pulled by a tractor and provided with a lifting mechanism, by means of which the bales are lifted onto the wrapping table from the side of the machine. A drawback with this procedure is the heavy construction of the machine, because lifting the bales from one side requires counterweights on the opposite side of the machine. In addition to being expensive, the heavy construction involves the drawback of causing compaction of the surface soil of the fields.

Yet another previously known procedure for the wrapping of bales with plastic is to use a trailable wrapping machine provided with an inclinable wrapping table and a grasper arm which grips the bale from above. In this procedure, the tractor moves the wrapping machine towards a bale on the ground by reversing, the wrapping table is turned into an inclined position and the grasping arm is extended far enough to ensure that it will reach across the bale while the tractor is reversing. When the inclined table hits the bale, the grasping arm is lowered and the bale is squeezed between the table and the arm. Next, the table is turned to a horizontal position and the grasper arm is raised high enough to enable the bale to be wrapped with plastic either by means of a rotating table or a special wrapping boom provided above the table. The wrapped-up bale is dropped back onto the field or to a storage place by inclining the table. A drawback in this procedure is that it is very difficult to center the bale on the table. A further drawback is that the overhead grasper arm hinders the use of an overhead rotating mechanism for the wrapping operation, so the bales have to be wrapped primarily by means of a rotatable wrapping table. The rotatable table con-

struction with its bearings and control system is heavy, complex and expensive. Another drawback is that the grasper arm is controlled by means of separate control elements, thus adding to the complexity, failure probability and price.

The invention also relates to an apparatus for the implementation of the above-mentioned procedure. The apparatus comprises a wrapping machine designed to be trailed by a tractor. The frame of the wrapping apparatus consists of a draw beam and an overhead supporting arm. The frame is provided with wheels turning on bearings and with an inclinable wrapping table mounted on the frame by means of turnable joints. Furthermore, the apparatus comprises at least one picking device for the picking up of the bale onto the wrapping table, and a wrapping assembly by means of which the plastic is wrapped around the bale.

The object of the present invention is to eliminate the drawbacks of the above-mentioned procedures and machines and to provide a reliable, light and easy-to-use procedure for the wrapping of bales with plastic as well as an apparatus implementing the procedure. The procedure and the apparatus are characterized by what is presented in the characterization part of the claims. The advantages of the procedure and apparatus of the invention include small size and light weight of the apparatus, because no counterweights are needed. Furthermore, because of the light weight of the machine, a small tractor can be used to power it and bigger tractors can be used to better advantage in other jobs. A further advantage is the simplicity of use, because the the picking-up, wrapping and removal of the bales from the wrapping machine can be effected by means of a single operating lever. A further advantage worth mentioning is the multi-function capability of the machine, because by using a few accessories the same basic machine can be converted into a side-driven type or hitched directly to a baler, in which case no separate powering means is needed.

In the following, the invention is described in detail by the aid of an example by referring to the accompanying drawings, in which

Fig. 1 presents the wrapping machine in lateral view  
 Fig. 2 presents the wrapping machine in top view  
 Fig. 3-7 present various phases of the picking-up, wrapping and removal of bales in lateral view  
 Fig. 8 presents a diagram of the hydraulic circuits of the wrapping machine.

To make it easier to understand the procedure, the apparatus of the invention is described first. The basic part of the frame of the apparatus consists of an essentially horizontal draw beam 2 designed for connection to a tractor. Attached to the rear end of the draw beam is a horizontal shaft 20 placed at right angles relative to the draw beam and provided at each

end with a wheel 4 rotatably mounted on the shaft. Mounted at a point between the shaft and that end of the draw beam which is linked to the tractor is an overhead supporting arm 5 which rises upwards from the beam and is bent backwards in its upper portion. The supporting arm carries a wrapping arm 15 rotatably mounted at its rear end. The wrapping arm 15 is bent downwards essentially in the same shape with the overhead supporting arm, in a way enabling the wrapping arm to turn horizontally about its vertical joint without touching the overhead supporting arm. The wrapping arm is rotated by a hydraulic motor 33 mounted on the supporting arm. The power transmission is implemented e.g. by using a chain 14 and sprockets. The wrapping arm supports a roll 16 of plastic placed in a vertical position at its lower end. The roll is gyrated around the fodder bale 1 to be wrapped.

The shaft 20 is provided with lugs 7 placed close to the wheel 4 at each end of the shaft. The wrapping table 3 is pivoted in the lugs by means of horizontal joints so that it can be tilted backwards to a suitable position to allow a bale to be picked up or removed. The tilting is implemented using a hydraulic power means 41, one end of which is linked to the wrapping table while the other end is linked to a lug 8 attached to the shaft between the wheels. The wrapping table 3 is of rectangular form, consisting of two side beams and two end beams. The table is linked to the shaft 20 by joints placed in the side beams. The machine has two horizontal rotating rollers 10 and 13 linked to the side beams by bearings placed at the ends of the rollers, which are at right angles to the side beams. In addition, the machine is provided with at least one belt 11 stretched around the rotating rollers so that when a bale of hay or the like is on the belt and the driving roller 10 is rotated, the free roller 13 will rotate due to belt friction. At the same time, the belt forms a concave pocket in which the fodder bale remains well in place during the wrapping operation. The driving roller 10 receives its rotating energy from a hydraulic motor 26 mounted on the wrapping table. The front edge of the table is provided with a guard 12 designed to prevent the bale from falling off the table.

The machine is provided with picking devices 6, turnably mounted on each rear corner of the wrapping table by means of a joint 19. The position of the joint 19 is so selected that, when the table 3 is inclined to its extreme position to remove or pick up a bale, the joint is in an essentially vertical position, so that the picking device turning about the joint 19 is near the ground, rotating in an essentially horizontal plane, i.e. in practice parallel to the ground surface. This arrangement makes it possible for the machine to handle bales of different diameters. The turning movement of the picking devices is produced by means of hydraulic power means 9, which are attached via joints to the picking devices 6 by one end

and by the other end to lugs 42 attached to the table 3. In their position of readiness, the picking devices are turned to their outer position so that their free ends are as far apart as possible. The picking devices turn from each side of the bale to its back and lower part.

The front edge of the free end of the picking device is provided with a bevel surface 17 to permit an effective bale-picking motion despite the softness of the edges of the bale rolls. This allows the picking device to advance some distance into the soft edge of the bale roll, yet without damaging the roll. In addition, the rear edge of the free end of the picking device is provided with a stopper 18 serving to prevent the picking device from advancing too far into the bale.

Fig. 8 presents a simplified diagram of the hydraulic system of the machine of the invention. The operator of the wrapping machine can produce all the necessary functions from the driver's seat of the tractor by means of a single operating lever and an electric switch. The wrapping machine is provided with a hydraulic unit 28 comprising an electric valve 22, pressure compensated quantity control valves 25 and 29, check valves 32, 35 and 36, a load lowering valve 38 and a direction valve 39, said valves being interconnected by hydraulic channels. Connected as power units to the hydraulic unit 28 are a hydraulic motor 33 rotating the wrapping arm 15, a hydraulic motor 26 rotating the driving roller 10, a hydraulic cylinder 41 used to incline the table 3, and hydraulic cylinders 9 producing the back-and-forth turning movement of the picking devices.

The hydraulic unit 28 is connected to the tractor's power output by connectors 21. The pressure and return channels alternate in the connectors 21 according to the position of the hydraulic operating lever provided on the tractor. The electric valve 22 serves to distribute the energy obtained from the tractor to the hydraulic motors 26 and 33 needed for the wrapping of the bales and to the hydraulic cylinders 9 and 41 needed for the lifting and lowering of the bales.

After the tractor driver has brought the wrapping machine to a suitable position in front of the bale and starts lifting it, the electricity is switched off with the electric switch, and the tractor's power output is connected to channels 30 and 31 as determined by the position of the electric valve. The pressure channel is now channel 31, through which the hydraulic oil flows to the load lowering valve 38 and from its secondary side further to the pressure side of the table inclining cylinder 41, i.e. to the backside of the piston. The pressure pushes the cylinder rod outwards from the cylinder, and consequently the table is turned back to its horizontal position, with the bale held on the table by the aid of the picking devices 6, now turned to their inner position. From the rod side of the cylinder, the oil correspondingly flows back to the load lowering valve, which lets the oil pass through it in an even flow into the return channel 30. The load lowering valve 38

enables smooth table motion and keeps the table in the position where it has been left. After the rod of the cylinder 41 has been pushed out completely, a mechanical link 40 attached to the cylinder rod turns the direction valve 39 from the non-conducting middle position to the conducting position, so that the oil flowing in the pressure channel 31 can flow through check valve 32 into channel 34, and further through the direction valve 39 into the rod spaces of the cylinders 9 of the picking devices. The cylinder rods are now retracted and the picking devices turn outwards to their position of readiness so as to be out of the way during the wrapping operation. From the pressure side of the cylinders 9, the oil flows correspondingly via the direction valve 39 into channel 37, from where it flows further via check valve 35 into the return channel 30 and back into the oil container. At this stage, the oil returning from the pressure side of the cylinders 9 cannot flow via check valves 32 and 36 into the pressure channel 31, because the pressure in this channel is higher. The apparatus is now ready to start the wrapping operation.

After the tractor driver has turned on the electric power by operating the electric switch, the electric valve is connected so as to direct the hydraulic oil into channels 23 and 24, of which, in the situation illustrated in Fig. 8, channel 23 is the pressure channel and channel 24 is the return channel, through which the oil returns to the container. In channel 23 there is a quantity control valve 25 through which a desired portion of the oil is passed, and this oil flows further into the hydraulic motor 33 of the wrapping arm. From the secondary side of this motor, the oil returns to the container via channel 24. Connected to the hydraulic circuit of the motor is a safety valve 27 which passes the oil through it in the event of the motion of the wrapping arm being stopped for an external reason, for instance if the arm hits an obstacle, e.g. a human being. That portion of the oil which is not passed through quantity control valve 25 into hydraulic motor 33 flows into another quantity control valve 29, through which again a desired portion of the oil flows further into the hydraulic motor 26 rotating the driving roller 10 used to produce the motion rotating the bale. From the secondary side of this motor, the oil returns to the container via channel 24. That portion of the oil which is not needed in either one of the hydraulic motors is branched off in quantity control valve 29 and returns directly to the container via channel 24.

After the bale has been wrapped, it can be removed from the wrapping table by inclining the table by means of cylinder 41. To do this, the tractor driver operates the electric switch to turn off the electric power, thereby causing the tractor's power output to be connected to the channels 30 and 31 controlling the hydraulic cylinders. To lower the bale, the tractor driver turns the hydraulic operating lever to the opposite position as compared to the lifting operation, thus

letting the operating pressure into channel 30 and further via load lowering valve 38 into the rod space of the table inclining cylinder 41, causing the rod to be retracted. At the same time, the return oil is discharged from the piston space of the cylinder via the load lowering cylinder into the return channel 31 and further into the container. At the start of the lowering operation, the pressurized oil is also allowed to flow via check valve 32 and channel 34 into direction valve 39 and through it further into the rod space of the hydraulic cylinders 9 of the picking devices. This ensures that the picking devices are in the open position during the lowering stage. Once the rod of hydraulic cylinder 41 has moved inwards through a certain distance, the mechanical link 40 causes the direction valve 39 to return to its middle position and the picking devices 6 are locked in the open position. The table 3 is tilted and the bale rolls off the table.

After this, the machine is moved to a new bale 20 while the table remains tilted. The inclining action goes on until the rod of the hydraulic cylinder 41 reaches its inner position. The mechanical link 40 now causes the direction valve 39 to assume a position in which the pressure channels 34 and 37 are crossed 25 in the direction valve. As a consequence, the oil in channel 34, in which the pressure is higher, flows into the piston space of the hydraulic cylinders 9 of the picking devices, thus causing the rods of these cylinders to protrude and the picking devices 6 to turn inwards. Now the picking devices first center and straighten the bale 1 and then grip it. Seeing that the bale has been successfully centered and gripped, the driver then turns the hydraulic operating lever to the other position, thus directing the hydraulic pressure 30 into channel 31 and causing the table 3 to turn back 35 to its horizontal position. At the same time, the picking devices remain locked in their inner position, holding the bale 1 steady on the table during the lifting.

Although the procedure of the invention has partly 40 already been described in connection with the description of the diagram of the hydraulic system, the procedure is briefly described in the following. At the start of an operating cycle, the driver approaches the bale to be wrapped by backing the wrapping machine 45 with the table so inclined that the table edge closest to the bale is down, close to the ground. Simultaneously, the picking devices remain in their open position, i.e. in the position of readiness. When the table touches the bale 1, the driver turns a hydraulic operating lever, whereupon the picking devices 6 turn 50 into their inner position, thereby centering and straightening the bale relative to the wrapping table 3. At the end of the turning movement of the picking devices, the table automatically turns into its horizontal position, lifting the bale with it. Next, the picking devices also turn automatically to their open position, whereupon the driver operates an electric switch to connect electric power to an electric valve. As a con-

sequence, the wrapping arm 15 of the machine and the bale rotating mechanism 10, 11, 13 and 26 are activated and a plastic sheet is wrapped around the bale while the latter is simultaneously rotated about its horizontal axis. When the driver thinks that the bale has enough plastic around it, he disconnects the supply of electricity to the electric valve and turns the hydraulic operating lever to a table inclining position. This causes the table 3 to tilt, whereupon the bale rolls off onto the ground. At this stage, the plastic sheet is also automatically cut off between the plastic roll 16 and the bale 1. The operating cycle starts anew and the driver moves the machine to the next bale.

It is obvious to a person skilled in the art that the invention is not restricted to the example described above, but that different embodiments of the invention may vary within the scope of the following claims. Thus the machine may have only one picking device 6 and the carriage is hitched to the tractor from its side. In this case, the bale to be picked up is approached by driving the tractor forwards, with the table tilted towards the bale. The arm of the picking device is provided with a centering element placed near the joint 19 at the front edge of the table. By means of the centering element, the bale is centered against a stop face provided in one of the front corners of the table, by turning the picking device from the side of the bale to its back and lower part. After this, the bale is lifted onto the table and the operation is carried on as described above.

## Claims

1. Procedure for wrapping a bale of hay or straw, such as a fodder bale (1), with plastic, in which procedure the bale to be wrapped is lifted onto a wrapping table (3) and plastic material is wrapped around the bale, whereupon the bale is removed from the wrapping table, characterized in that the operation of wrapping the bale with plastic comprises at least the following stages:
  - the wrapping table (3) is tilted so as to allow a bale to be picked up from the field
  - the wrapping machine is moved towards the bale with the wrapping table in a position where that edge which is closer to the bale is lower down, close to the ground
  - picking devices (6) designed to lift the bale are held in a position of readiness during the approach, and when the machine is sufficiently close to the bale, the picking devices are activated
  - the bale is lifted up from the ground by means of the picking devices and centered relative to the wrapping table
  - the wrapping table is turned back into a substantially horizontal position
  - the picking devices are turned back into the position of readiness
  - the bale is wrapped with plastic, whereupon it is removed from the wrapping table.
2. Procedure according to claim 1 for wrapping a straw fodder bale with plastic, characterized in that two picking devices are used which are opened into their position of readiness, the wrapping table is inclined towards the bale being approached and the bale is approached by reversing, with the picking devices in their open position and substantially parallel to the ground surface and closer to the bale to be picked up than the wrapping table, and that when the bale touches the wrapping table the picking devices are turned in towards each other, the bale is locked in place by the picking devices and the wrapping table is turned into a substantially horizontal position, and the picking devices are opened into their position of readiness, the bale is wrapped with plastic and removed from the wrapping table by inclining the table.
3. Procedure according to claim 1 for wrapping a straw fodder bale with plastic, characterized in that only one picking device is used which is opened into its position of readiness, the wrapping table is inclined towards the bale being approached and the bale is approached by driving forwards past the bale, with the picking device in its open position and substantially parallel to the ground surface and closer to the bale to be picked up than the wrapping table, and that when the bale touches the wrapping table, the picking device is turned in towards the wrapping table, the bale is locked in place by the picking device and the wrapping table is turned into a substantially horizontal position, the picking device is opened into its position of readiness, the bale is wrapped with plastic and removed from the wrapping table by inclining the table.
4. Apparatus for implementing the procedure of claim 1, comprising a wrapping unit designed to be pulled by a tractor and having a frame part consisting of a draw beam (2) and an overhead supporting arm (15), said unit being provided with wheels (4) mounted with bearings on said frame part, and with an inclinable wrapping table (3) supported by a turnable joint on the frame part, said apparatus further comprising at least one picking device (6) designed to pick up a bale (1) onto the wrapping table, as well as wrapping equipment (14-16,33), by means of which plastic material is wrapped around the bale, characterized in that the picking device (6) is mounted by means of a joint (19) substantially close to a

wrapping table corner which can be lowered and  
in such a position that, when the wrapping table  
is in its inclined position ready to receive a bale,  
the motion of the picking device about its joint (19)  
takes place in a substantially horizontal plane      5  
close to the ground.

5. Apparatus according to claim 4, characterized in  
that it has two picking devices (6), one of which  
is mounted with a joint on the lefthand rear corner  
of the wrapping table and the other on its right-  
hand rear corner, said picking devices being  
placed symmetrically relative to the longitudinal  
middle line of the table, and that in the position of  
readiness the picking devices are in their open  
position, in which their free ends are farthest from  
each other.      10
6. Apparatus according to claim 4, characterized in  
that it has only one picking device, mounted with  
a joint on the outermost front corner of the wrap-  
ping table, and that the wrapping table is provided  
with a stopping piece for centering the bale,  
mounted on the innermost front corner of the  
table.      15      20      25

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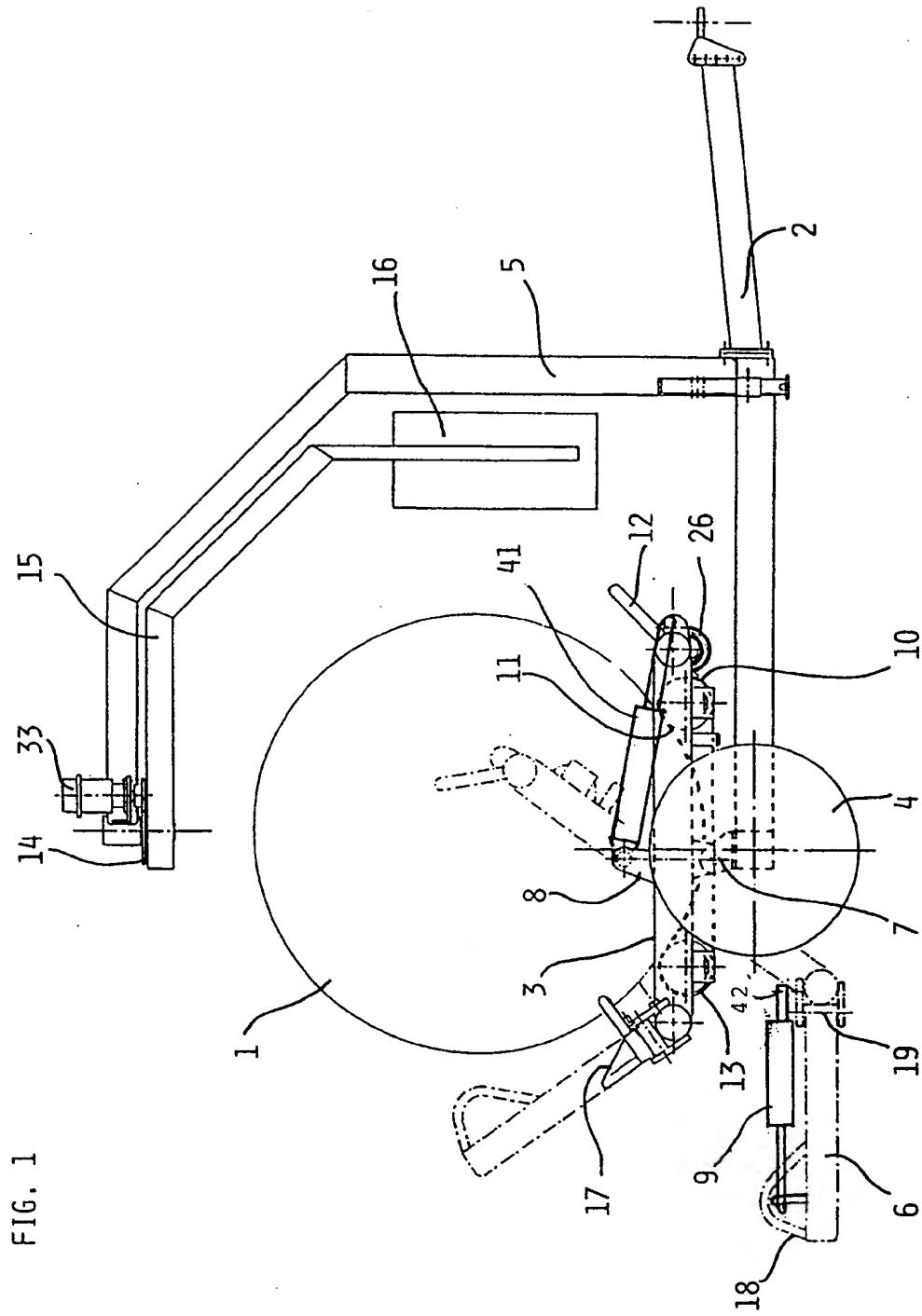
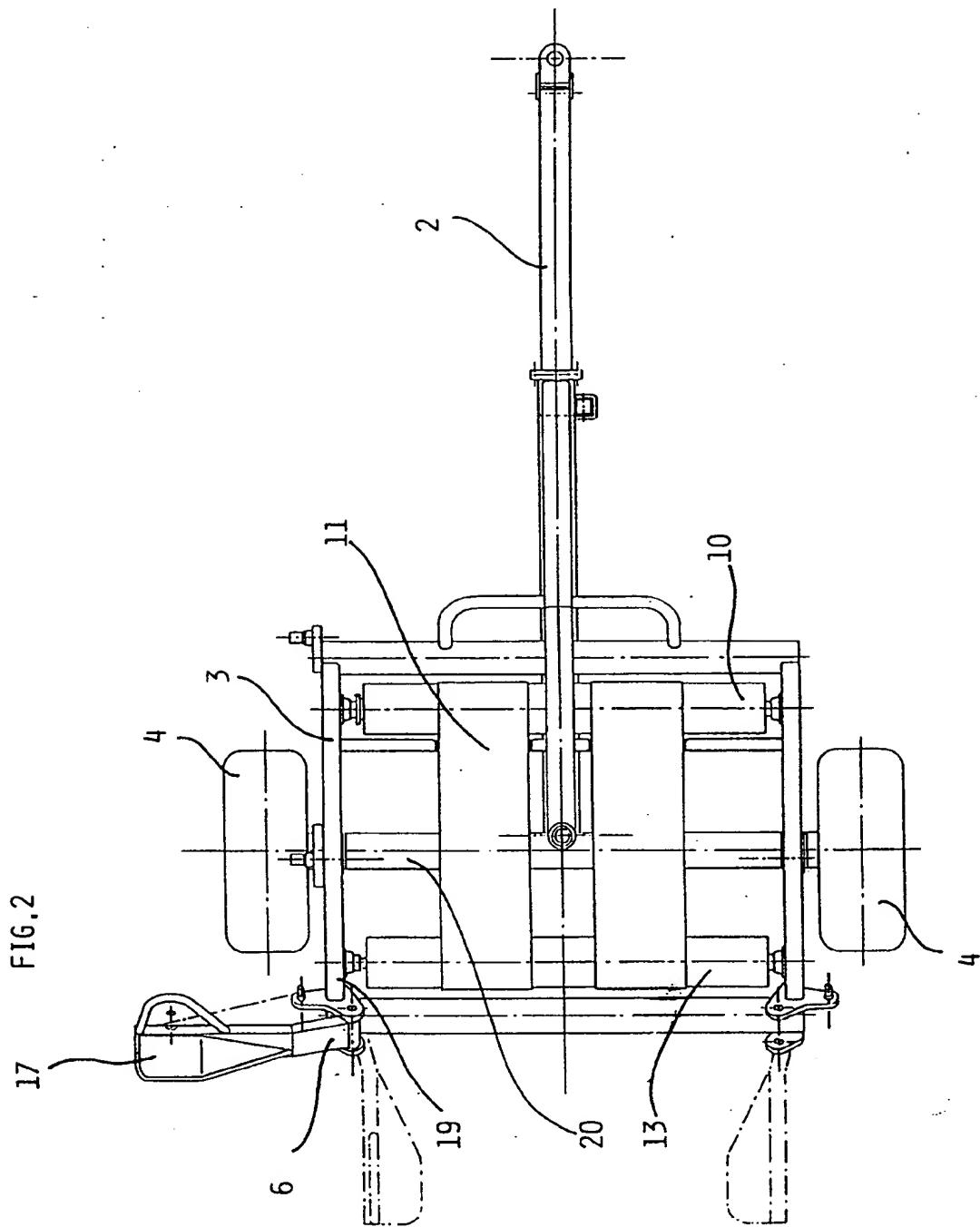


FIG. 1



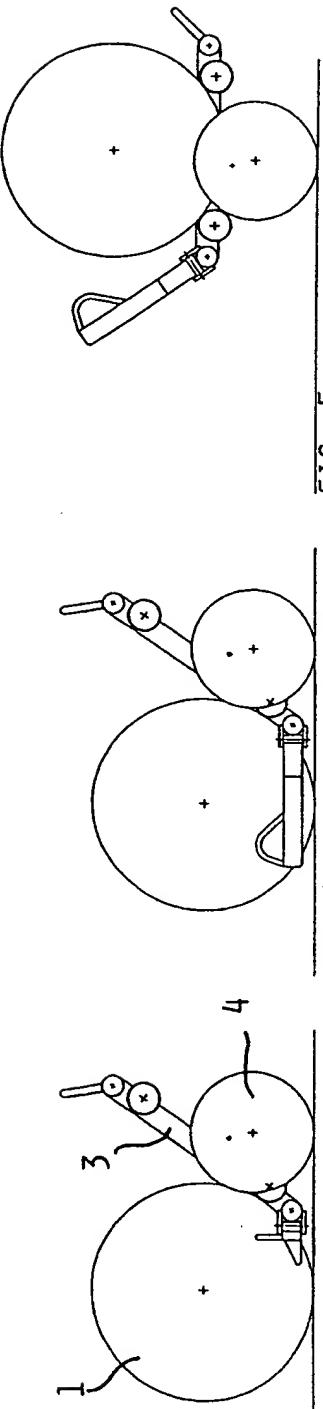


FIG. 5

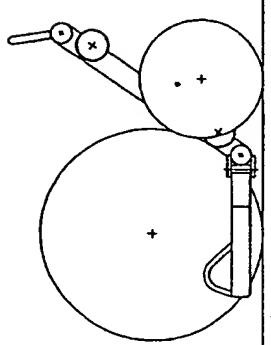


FIG. 6

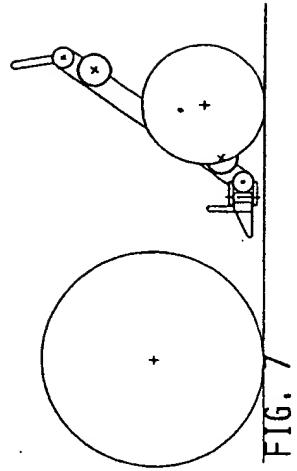
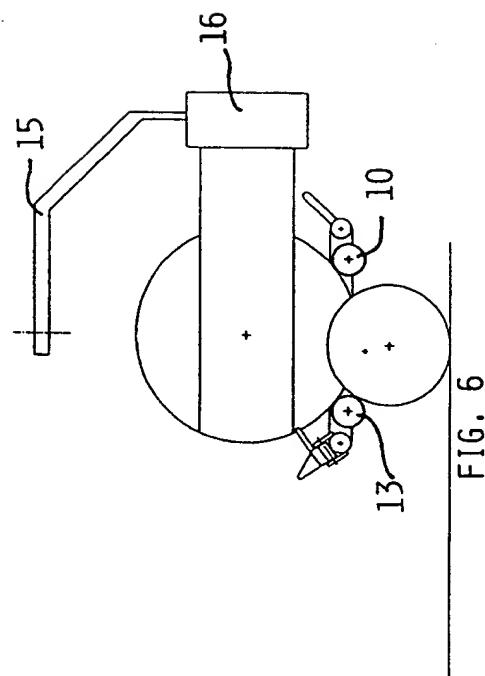
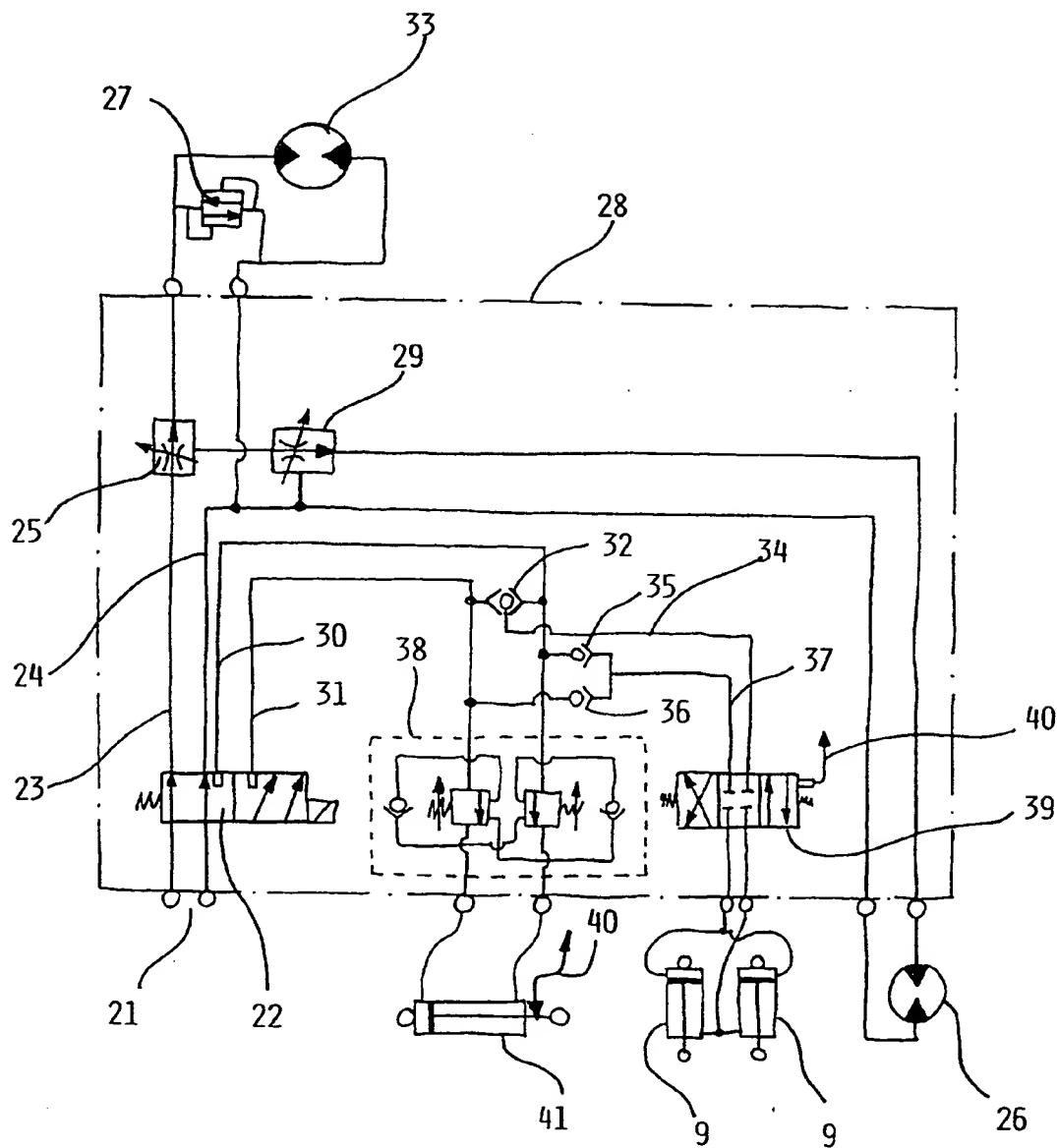


FIG. 8





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## EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

EP 92 10 2538

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.5)
X	EP-A-0 394 011 (ROYNEBERG) * column 4, line 37 - column 7, line 9; figures 1-10 *	1,3,4,6	A01F15/07
X	EP-A-0 362 754 (GREISSINGER) * column 2, line 41 - column 4; figures 1-4 *	1,3,4,6	
X	WO-A-9 013 995 (FYKSE) * page 8, line 10 - page 12; figures 1-5 *	1-5	
Y	EP-A-0 336 739 (WALTON)	1	
A	* column 2, line 60 - column 5, line 36; figures 1-8 *	2,4,5	
Y	US-A-3 877 595 (EDELMAN)	1	
A	* column 1, line 67 - column 4, line 57; figures 1-4 *	2,3,4,5	
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TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5)			
A01F A01D			
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	
THE HAGUE	21 MAY 1992	VERMANDER R.H.	
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